

U. S. Sub-Treasury Building
Wall and Nassau Streets
New York, N. Y.

HABS No. NY-470

80

HABS
NY,
31-NEYO,
53-

PHOTOGRAPHS

District No. 4
New York, N. Y.

Historic American Buildings Survey
Wakefield Worcester, District Officer
25 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y.

UNITED STATES SUB-TREASURY
Nassau and Pine Streets, Manhattan
New York County, New York

HABS
NY,
31-NEYO,
53-
(Page 1)

Owner: United States Government

Date of erection: May 1834-May 1841

Architect: Ithiel Town and Alexander J. Davis

Present condition: Good

Description: (From report of April 1935 by Thomas T. Waterman)

The exterior design of the building is in the Greek Doric style with ^{portico} porticos on the Wall (south) and Pine (north) Street fronts. The Nassau Street (west) and the east side, now obscured by adjacent buildings, are of fourteen bays, the two end bays opening into the porticos, and the others being recessed between pilasters. Because of the great difference in grade between Pine and Wall Streets the south front has eighteen granite steps the full width of the building, while the north front is almost level with the street and has only three steps. Only the central bay on this side is accessible, as the spaces between the columns are closed with cast-iron fences, evidently original and very interesting. The areaway on the Nassau Street (west) side similarly is protected by a fence extending the full length of this side. This fence is also of cast iron but of slightly different design.

The interior is of great architectural distinction and importance. A wide vaulted hall is entered from the north, flanked on either side with two huge rooms with vaulted ceilings. At the southern end of the hall is the entrance to the magnificent rotunda. At right angles to the hall and between the rotunda and east and west rooms are two lateral passages, the eastern one being the stair hall. The balancing passage is at present closed off, but there are evidences that at an earlier date this too may have contained another stairway. The rotunda carries up into the second-floor space, the plan of this floor and the floor above being similar to the first floor.

The architecture and ornament of the interior is very distinguished, being a beautiful and restrained rendering of the Greek neo-classic. The entrance hall is divided into bays by marble piers surmounted by a simply moulded marble cornice, the bed mould of which is carved with egg-and-dart ornament. The walls and ceilings are plastered and now painted ivory white.

The ceiling is an elliptical barrel-vault with penetrations and a traverse band from pier to pier, the soffit of which is paneled with anthemion. Doorways framed with marble architraves are placed at the center of each bay, the original cast-iron doors having been replaced by later wood paneled doors and frames. The stairway is formed by one-piece interlocking granite blocks cantilevered from the wall. The balustrade is a rather unsatisfactory design in cast iron of anthemion scrolls forming baluster panels fixed to each tread. The handrail is disproportionally heavy and, with the balustrade, is now painted dark green.

The east and west rooms are very large, four bays long and two bays wide, completely covered with intersecting barrel-vaulting, which is supported down the center by three fluted Greek Doric columns of stone painted white. The vault is enriched with sunk panels. Both these rooms are now partitioned off into offices, and their architecture is much obscured because of this.

The hall in the basement is much the same as on the first floor but simpler and lower. The flanking rooms have been altered for use as vaults, the floors being lowered and the walls lined with steel plate. The undercroft of the rotunda must have been extremely effective in its original state. Now, however, it is mutilated by a men's lavatory on one side and by supply lockers, dressing rooms, carpenter benches, etc. It is a circular room with a huge circular stone pier in the center to support the marble floor above, and pierced by two intersecting passages. Between it and the walls is sprung a shallow plaster barrel-vault. There are four recessed bays on the cardinal axes, each of which is set off from the rest of the undercroft by four extremely truncated unfluted columns of the Greek Doric order. These are hardly two diameters high and carry a simple entablature.

The rotunda is directly over the undercroft and has the same plan except that the central pier is omitted. Each of the recessed bays is screened by a range of four fluted Corinthian columns of marble placed in antis between fluted Corinthian pilaster-piers. Between the latter are recessed panels containing doors into rooms in each corner of the square, out of which the rotunda is devised. A continuous entablature surmounts the columns and pilasters. There is an elliptical domical ceiling covering the rotunda, with recessed panels and a lantern which largely lights the room, piercing the crown of the dome. In each of the recessed bays are doorways with marble surrounds. Cast-iron galleries occur in each of the recessed bays at the second-floor line, entered by doors at this level. The floors of the galleries are of cast iron with delicately coffered soffits, supported on attenuated iron brackets. The rail is also of cast iron, and is formed of caryatids holding in their hands acanthus scrolls which make the infill. There are two spiral, self-

supporting stone stairs leading from the rotunda to the third floor. These are entered from doors centered on the two rotunda piers at the south end of the building. The rotunda floor is of grey and white marble, laid in simple geometric design. Much of this is covered by a temporary raised floor for the counters of the Passport Division, which uses the rotunda. These counters are baroque Victorian, and, while much inferior to the rest of the architectural design, are of considerable interest as examples of their period.

The roof is constructed of overlapping marble slabs supported by brick arches.

Additional Data:

The building was originally designed as a custom house for the City of New York and was used as such until about 1860, when it was taken over as the United States Sub-Treasury.

A competition was held in 1833 for the design of the building, and first prize was awarded Ithiel Town and Alexander J. Davis. The commissioners, however, apparently did not like the interior arrangement and they, therefore, engaged William Ross, an English architect then residing in New York, to modify the interior. Ross' modification gave a plan substantially like that which now exists, as well as an arrangement which would permit fireproof masonry vaulting, which the present building has. These designs were published in London's Architectural Magazine of London in December 1835. Ross was followed by John Frazee, who is generally known as the architect. Frazee superintended almost the entire construction of the building and undoubtedly prepared most of the working drawings and details, following, however, the exterior composition of Town and Davis and the interior arrangement of William Ross.

Mrs. Thomas Wood Hastings, granddaughter of John Frazee, has drawings and other valuable data on the building which is available for inspection. Mrs. Hastings says that the marble of which the entire building was constructed was known as "dolomite," and came from a quarry near Tuckahoe in Westchester, New York.

The Avery Library of Columbia University owns one of Davis' sections showing the original arrangement of the interior. It also possesses the London Magazine with Ross' article, together with a drawing for some of the detail by John Frazee.

Author: *Ingwin M. Rachelle*

Approved: *116 5/5/41*

DESCRIPTION OF THE TREASURY BUILDING

The description of the building in Barber and Howe's "Historical Collections of the State of New York," published in 1841, indicates the pride with which this building was then regarded by the citizens of New York before it became dwarfed by surrounding skyscrapers:

"This structure surpasses any building of its size in the world, both in the beauty of its design and the durability of its construction. It is in the form of a parallelogram, 200 feet long and 80 feet wide; and about 80 feet in height from the bottom of the foundation wall to the top. Brick, granite and marble are used in the construction; all the inside walls are of brick, with the exception of those in the rotunda, which are of marble. The steps and stairs throughout are of a light-colored granite, employed for the sake of durability. At the extremity of the entrance hall is the rotunda, or large circular apartment to be used as the collector's office. This is a most splendid room; the roof is supported by 16 beautiful marble columns, highly polished, with Corinthian capitals, 30 feet high and 2 feet 8 inches in diameter. The diameter of the rotunda is 60 feet in the clear, and 80 feet in the recesses. The largest blocks of marble used in the building weigh thirty-three tons."

"The marble slabs for the roof weigh 300 or 400 pounds, and lap over each other eight inches with an upper and under lip, to allow of the expansive power, and to keep out the least particle of water. The entire outside of this splendid edifice is of marble with the exception of the granite steps. There is not a particle of woodwork in any part of the building, and it is probably the only structure in the world that has been erected so entirely fire-proof. This elegant edifice was commenced in May, 1834, and finished in May, 1841. The cost, ground inclusive, was \$1,175,000--building alone, \$950,000. The architect is Mr. John Frazee, and it will probably remain for ages a monument of his skill."

James Miller, in his "New York as It Is," printed in 1863, says of the building:

"It is a splendid building, constructed in the Doric order of Grecian architecture. It is built in the most substantial manner of white marble, something after the model of the Parthenon at Athens; as a piece of masonry, it is equal to any structure extant, and to judge from appearances, likely to be come as enduring as the Pyramids."

DESCRIPTION OF CUSTOM HOUSE

"THE NEW CUSTOM HOUSE.--The structure intended for the accommodation of the revenue officers of this city, is nearly completed. The fences and scaffolding have been removed, which gives a fairer view of the general outlines and proportions of the building. It is two hundred feet in length and ninety feet wide, with two porticos of eight columns each fronting on Wall and Pine streets, constructed after the Grecian Doric Style of architecture.

"A hasty survey of the interior of the edifice enables us to give a description of some of its parts. The great room in the centre, designed to be the collector's department, is between eighty and ninety feet in diameter, with a dome overhead, supported by sixteen columns, made of solid pieces of marble. The capitals of the columns, as well as the panelings of the vaulted ceiling, are exceedingly rich and beautiful. The columns themselves are of a Corinthian order, copied we presume, from those of the temple of Jupiter Stator in Rome.

"There are three stories above the basement, the floors of which are formed by vaultings of groined arches, and the ceilings of which are finished in a chaste style of panel work. On the side towards Pine street, there are eight rooms of similar dimensions thirty by fifty, intended for the offices of the Naval agent, Surveyor and Receiver. In the second story are four galleries, running around the great central room. Two stairways, right and left, rise about midway of the interior, ascending from the basement to the attic. Besides these there are two spiral stairways running from the rotunda to the attic, to facilitate access to the upper rooms on the south front of the house.

"The floors and roof of this building are entirely of marble-, and there is not a particle of wood in any part of it. All the doors, sashes, and railings are made of cast iron, but what has appeared to us somewhat singular is that all the iron work, which is neatly polished, should be painted white. It gives too great a uniformity of appearance to the building, which being white in every part, would be improved if the iron work were left in its natural color or brought to a light bronze finish. We suggest the matter to the taste of the architect, Mr. Frazer".-- (Evening Post.)

(See "The New World" - Sept. 26, 1840 - Pages 263-270)

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SUB-TREASURY BUILDING
New York, New York

HABS
NY,
31-NEYO,
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Owner: U. S. Government, National Park Service

Date of Erection: 1842

Architect: Ithiel Town and Alex J. Davis.

Builder: Unknown

Present Condition: Good

Materials of Construction: Granite, brick, cast iron, marble floors.

Other Existing Records: History of Public Buildings under care of the Treasury Department; Washington, 1901, p.417; Pagent of America, T. F. Hamlin, Yale, 1926, p.135; The Architect, February 1929, p.522.

Additional Data: Land purchased, 1816, 1832 and 33. Building completed in 1842. Cost \$939,301. Used as Customs House 1842-62 then designated Sub-Treasury. Transferred to National Park Service recently as Historic monument, and now maintained by them though used in part for Passport Bureau.

Custom House (Sub-Treasury Building)
(Federal Hall National Memorial)
28 Wall Street
New York City
New York

HABS No. NY-470

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Addendum to

U.S. Sub-Treasury Building
Wall Street and Nassau Street
New York City, New York

PHOTOGRAPHS

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ADDENDUM TO
U.S. CUSTOM HOUSE
(U.S. SUB-TREASURY BUILDING)
(FEDERAL HALL NATIONAL MEMORIAL)
28 Wall Street
New York City
New York County
New York

HABS No. NY-470

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31-NEYO,
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